



State of Tennessee Department of Children's Services

## **Administrative Policies and Procedures: 1.15**

**Subject: News Media Relations in Youth Development Centers and DCS Group Homes**

**Supersedes: DCS 1.15, 04/01/03**

**Local Policy: Yes**

**Local Procedures: Yes**

**Training Required: No**

**Applicable Practice Model Standard(s): Yes**

**Approved by:**

**Effective date: 05/15/97**

**Revision date: 07/01/05**

### **Application**

To All Department of Children's Services Youth Development Center and DCS Group Home Employees

**Authority:** TCA 37-5-102, 37-5-106

### **Policy**

Representatives of the news media shall be permitted limited access to Department of Children's Services (DCS) facilities subject to restrictions as outlined in this policy.

### **Procedures**

**A. Public information program** This policy and the local policies submitted to central office from all DCS facility locations serve as the Public Information Program.

**B. Information available to the media**

**1. Authorization required**

The Departmental Public Information Officer (PIO) must be notified during and after working hours and their authorization obtained before any statement confirming information may be released to the media.

**2. News releases**

News releases must be disseminated only through the PIO or by advance approval from the PIO.

**C. Contact with the media****1. Limits of contact**

The PIO or designee is the only DCS employee authorized to interact with the media.

**2. Report of contact**

Any DCS employee other than the PIO who talks with the news media must immediately report the contact to the appropriate Executive Director and the departmental PIO.

**3. Evaluation of media requests for contact**

- a) Requests for media contact will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis that are determined by the right or need to know.
- b) The overall facility program must not be jeopardized by the presence of the media.
- c) Media contact with a particular youth must not disturb or threaten the progress a youth has made in the program.

**D. Local policy****1. Contents of local policy**

Each YDC and DCS Group Home must develop a local policy and forward it to the PIO. The local policy must include all of the following:

- a) Identification of areas in the facility that are normally accessible to media representatives,
- b) Designation of an employee within the facility authorized to speak with media representatives on behalf of the office or DCS,
- c) Identification of data and information protected by privacy laws and/or freedom of information laws,

- d) The procedure for media coverage of special events or incidents,
- e) News release procedures,
- f) Procedures for handling requests to tour the facility.

**2. Documentation**

- a) Each facility must notify the PIO of the designated contact person(s) for each facility.
- b) The PIO, the appropriate Central Office Director and the facility originating the local policy must maintain a copy of all local media policies.
- c) The PIO must maintain a list of the departmental contact persons.

**E. Youth interviews****1. Determination**

Requests for interviews with youth will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

**2. Rights of youth**

Interviews are voluntary. The youth has the right not to be interviewed, photographed, or recorded by the media.

**3. Release by parent(s)/guardian**

- a) If the media requests to interview, record, or photograph youth, the assigned case manager must obtain a release form *CS-0559, Authorization For Release of Child-Specific Information From DCS and Contract Service Providers*, signed by the youth and the parent(s) or guardian of the youth prior to allowing the youth to be interviewed, recorded, or photographed.
- b) If a youth is over the age of eighteen (18) and is in state custody, the parental consent is not required and the youth may consent and sign the release.
- c) If parental consent is required and if the parents or guardians are not known or their addresses are unknown and cannot be located, the YDC Superintendent or DCS Group Home Supervisor or designees may at his/her discretion, with the approval of the appropriate Executive Director, authorize the release

of information. In all other circumstances, parental permission must be in writing and will be necessary in order for any media interview or release of information.

- d) If a parent or guardian objects to the interview or photograph being released through the media, the YDC Superintendent or DCS Group Home Supervisor or designees shall not have any discretion and any information and photographs from the interview shall not be released. The appropriate section on form CS-0559, *Authorization For Release of Child-Specific Information From DCS and Contract Service Providers*, shall be signed if there are objections to the interview or photographs being released to the media.
- e) The signed release must become part of the youth's case file.

**F. Interviews with staff****1. Voluntary**

Personal interviews with staff members must be granted voluntarily.

**2. Approval required**

Any staff member wishing to grant an interview regarding DCS must obtain approval in advance from the appropriate Executive Director and the PIO.

**G. Policy violation**

Violation of this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination.

**Forms**

CS-0559      Authorization For Release of Child-Specific Information From the Department of Children's Services and Contract Service Providers

**Collateral Documents**

*None*

**Standards**

3-JCRF-1A-16

3-JCRF-1A-17

3-JCRF-1A-18

3-JCRF-1A-25

3-JCRF-1A-26

3-JCRF-1A-27

3-JCRF-1A-27-1

3-JTS-1A-25

3-JTS-1A-26

3-JTS-1A-27

3-JTS-1A-27-1

3-JTS-3D-05

DCS Practice Model Standard – 8-306